Investigating dubbing
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Learning from the past, looking to the future

Charlotte Bosseaux

Introduction

Dubbing, the process whereby the original dialogue track of an audiovisual text is replaced with a re-recorded version in the target language, has been practised for many years all over the world. From a semiotic perspective, dubbing is an example of ‘isosemiotic’ translation, where information is conveyed via the same semiotic channels in the source and target texts (Gottlieb 2005: 4). This chapter examines how dubbing has developed since it was first conceived and used, following the advent of sound in film, and is structured around three main sections. After outlining a brief history of dubbing, it moves on to deliver an overview of established research issues in dubbing studies, including the research methods used under each strand, and an account of the influence of technology on dubbing practice and scholarship. The third section focuses on future trajectories for dubbing studies and draws attention to new debates coalescing around those emerging scholarly trends.

A history of dubbing

The history of dubbing has been explored in some detail by Izard (1992) and Chaume (2012), to name but a couple of scholars, and the present volume also contains a chapter on the history of audiovisual translation (AVT) (Chapter 2). This first section should therefore be read in conjunction with Chapter 2 to gain a better understanding of how dubbing fits in and has developed within AVT.

Dubbing has been used and studied for many years all over the world, as documented by Chaume (2012: 6-10), who presents a ‘global map of dubbing’ in Europe, Asia, the Americas, Africa and Oceania. Dubbing—which is commonly used in Austria, Belgium, Brazil, China, the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Hungary, India, Iran, Italy, Japan, Korea, Peru, Slovakia, Spain and Turkey—is ‘one of the oldest modes’ of AVT whose ‘origins can be traced back to the late 1920s’ (ibid.: 1). Indeed, it is when ‘written language on screen in silent movies’ in the form of intertitles was introduced ‘to accompany the iconic representation of images’ that translation became ‘essential to the full understanding of filmic narration’ (ibid.: 10). In the late 1920s, dialogue began to be incorporated in films...
that became known as ‘talkies’. However, even before the advent of sound, famous directors regarded translation as instrumental for the expansion of film as a global form of art and entertainment. For instance, ‘as early as 1923, David W. Griffith noted that only 5 per cent of the world’s population then spoke English and rhetorically wondered why he had to lose 95 per cent of his potential audience’ (ibid.: 11).

Thus, the popularization of talkies prompted the need for different types of translation, from the provision of intertitles to dubbing and subtitling—initially into French, German and Spanish (Izard 1992). As noted in Chaume (2004a and 2012), foreign audiences did not react positively to these early forms of translation undertaken during the post-production process. In the 1930s, a new solution was explored in the form of multiple film versions, through which translation became an integral part of the production process. Multiple versions designates the process whereby the same director would make the same film in two or three different languages (e.g. French, German and Spanish) using the same actors, although on occasion the actors might be changed if additional languages were involved. One can imagine that such a venture proved very costly and after a few years, when dubbing and subtitling techniques had become more developed, the translation of films was once again relegated to the distribution process, where it has remained to this day. As will be elaborated below in a section on new debates and future research trajectories in dubbing, the fact that dubbing is currently part of the distribution process may be detrimental to the quality of translated audiovisual products and scholars are suggesting various alternatives to this state of affairs.

There are different reasons why dubbing has been preferred over subtitling in the different countries where it has taken root, although the situation is not monolithic and even ‘dubbing countries’ such as Brazil, France or India are increasingly using subtitling with fansubbing practices, for instance. Until recently there was a debate over whether subtitling is better than dubbing—as discussed for instance in the introduction of Luyken et al. (1991) and Díaz Cintas (2004)—but this discussion has now been dismissed by scholars for being obsolete, since the reasons for opting for one over the other are varied (including, but not limited to, economic, historical, and political factors). Crucially, advances in technology, as will be outlined below, have also evolved and are still changing the AVT landscape.

Going back to the reasons why certain audiovisual industries end up opting for specific AVT modes, the choice of dubbing has been often accounted for in terms of censorship and manipulation—in particular in relation to Spain, Italy and Germany (see, for instance, Danan 1991). On the other hand, it has also been argued that the strength and resilience of dubbing in certain audiovisual markets—including Spain, Germany, Italy and France—boil down to viewers’ habits and expectations. So while in Spain, for instance, the imposition of dubbing under Franco’s dictatorship sought to facilitate censorship and manipulation, this modality of AVT remains strong nowadays insofar as Spanish viewers have become used to dubbing and what it involves.

**Research issues in dubbing studies**

Various themes and challenges have attracted the attention of scholars who have contributed to the expansion of existing knowledge on dubbing in the last few decades. Specialists have addressed, for example, the impact of dubbing translational norms or conventions in the target culture. Consideration has also been given to the challenges that translators have to tackle when presented with ideologically loaded and culture-specific elements (e.g. Danan 1991, Agost 1999, Merino et al. 2005, Richart Marset 2012, Ballester 2001 and Ranzato 2011, 2012), humour (e.g. Zabalbeascoa 1996a, 1996b, 2005, Vandaele 2002, Chiaro 2006,
Martínez-Sierra 2008), as well as dialectal and linguistic variation (e.g. Di Giovanni et al. 1994, Dore 2009, Parini 2009).

Like other AVT modes, dubbing has been primarily studied using a descriptive translation studies framework—as illustrated by the work of Karamitroglou (2000) in the Greek context, Goris (1993) in the French context, Ballester (2001) and Sanz Ortega in Spain (2015), and Pavesi (2009) in Italy. These studies have been and still are important in terms of their capacity to shed light on the socio-historical contexts in which dubbing is performed, highlighting target text norms, the status of source and target cultures, and strategies used by translators. It should be noted, however, that most of these studies have been performed in Western Europe and dubbing research would greatly benefit from studies conducted outside of this region.

Insofar as space restrictions preclude a detailed exploration of these established research themes, the remainder of this section will focus on a selection of issues that have driven developments in the dubbing research landscape in the last few decades.

Synchronization

Dubbing is an example of constrained translation, insofar as it involves the mediation of texts that are made up of various forms of semiotics, namely both verbal and non-verbal meaning-making resources. It is therefore not surprising that much of the initial research into dubbing in the late 1980s predominantly emphasized medial constraints in dubbing, particularly synchronization—and, more specifically, lip-synchronization. Technical constraints linked to the different types of synchronization have been studied from a research angle in various subfields of AVT, including multimodality, sociolinguistics and linguistic variation.

When it comes to the constraints derived from the observance of dubbing conventions, Chaume (2012) distinguishes six aspects or ‘priorities that must be taken into account in a standard dubbing with the concept of ideal receiver in mind’ (2012: 15). These priorities include acceptable lip-sync, credible and realistic lines of dialogue, coherence between images and words, loyal translation, clear sound quality and acting standards. When researching this mode of AVT, many scholars have considered the constraints inherent to the dubbing process. As noted above, emphasis has been placed specifically on synchronization, which is defined in its most general sense as a process consisting of ‘matching the target language translation and the articulatory and mouth movements of the screen actors and actresses, and ensuring that the utterances and pauses in the translation match those of the source text’ (Chaume 2012: 68).

There are three types of synchronization. The first one, ‘lip’ or ‘phonetic synchrony’ (a term originally used by Fodor 1976), involves ‘adapting the translation to the articulatory movements of the on-screen characters, especially in close-ups and extreme close-ups’ (Chaume 2012: 68). The second one, kinesic synchrony, is ‘the synchronisation of the translation with the actors’ body movements’ (ibid.: 69), while the third one, isochrony, corresponds to the ‘synchronisation of the duration of the translation with the screen characters’ utterances’ (ibid.; drawing from Whitman-Linsen 1992: 28). These three dimensions of synchrony have been discussed at length by Agost 1999; Chaume 2004c, 2012; Chaves 2000, Fodor 1976, Goris 1993, Luyken et al. 1991, Mayoral et al. 1988, and Whitman-Linsen 1992. As far as lip-synchronization is concerned, Chaume (2012: 74) notes that phonetic equivalence takes precedence over semantic or pragmatic equivalence when dubbing close-up shots: the priority at that point is finding a word that will match the screen actor’s mouth movements, rather than a term that has the same or similar meaning
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to the word being used in the original dialogue. When it comes to kinesic synchrony, body language may accompany the delivery of speech on screen in various ways, thus adding nuances to or complementing the meaning of the characters’ lines. Finally, when trying to achieve isochrony, the dubbed dialogue may have to be shortened and certain words may have to be substituted by shorter ones or omitted altogether. Ideally, any changes in semantic meaning derived from efforts to secure maximum synchrony should not affect characterization, i.e. the way in which we perceive characters, or the overall meaning of an audiovisual product. One must bear in mind that certain vocabulary choices could end up having an impact on characterization if, for instance, they carry negative connotations in the target language that were not present in the source text. This may happen, for example, if a character were to use the work ‘chick’ instead of the more neutral ‘girl’ to designate a ‘young woman’ in the translated dialogue. Uttering the word ‘chick’ could thus be detrimental to the way a given character is perceived by the target language audience.

It should be noted, however, that synchronization is not merely a concern for dubbing; it is also an integral part of original audiovisual products, as part of what is typically referred to as sound post-synchronization. Sound in films is usually not natural, i.e. noises that can be heard in the background are usually recorded after the film has been shot. In most cases, this is done by ‘foley artists’, i.e. sound recordists who seek to recreate realistic ambient sounds using creative strategies, e.g. recording the sound of sizzling bacon to imitate rain and that of roaring lions for car engines. During the dubbing process, adapters and sound engineers are able to substitute part of the film’s ‘composite soundtrack’, which combines a number of tracks where dialogue, music and sound effects are recorded separately. As Ranzato (2016: 155) explains, dubbing films into another language involves creating ‘a new dubbing track’ in the target language:

An important technical element needed to prepare the local version of a film is the music and effects track (M&E track) also known as the international soundtrack, which joins together the separate tracks of sound effects and music. The M&E track contains all sound elements of the film except the dialogue, which comes in a separate track and is substituted by local distributors with a dubbed track in the native language. A skilful post-production handling of the mixing of this track containing music and sound effects with the new track containing the dubbed dialogue is of crucial importance for the creation of a good local version.

Another type of synchronization worth mentioning in relation to dubbing and the challenges it entails is ‘character synchrony’ (Whitman-Linsen 1992), which pertains to the target audience’s expectations as to what the voice of a character should sound like. As Chaume notes, ‘in general, a child actor cannot be dubbed by an older male voice; a woman’s voice must sound feminine; and the “baddie” must sound grave and sinister’ (2012: 69–70). However, abiding by these conventions may not always be practical or feasible in the industry—e.g. local legislation may not allow children to become involved in dubbing work. Very little has been written on this topic although, as elaborated below, Bosseaux’s work on performance and characterization in dubbing (2015, 2018) provides insightful views on voice as an integral part of a character’s identity and on the importance of choosing appropriate voices.

When discussing synchronization, it is also essential to mention the notion of genre. Indeed, the extent to which synchronization is achieved depends on the genre and type of audiovisual material the translator is working with. Chaume emphasizes that a ‘thorough
application of all synchronization types is required for the television series genre, although the degree of perfection is not as high as that demanded by the big screen’ (2012: 76). Indeed, films require a high quality of all types of synchronization since mismatches could result in a dubbed film getting a negative reception and failing in terms of its box office performance. Cartoons are also ‘more flexible because of their young audience, who are more likely to miss such aspects (Chaume 2004c: 46). Finally, it must be emphasized that lip-synchronization constraints are not solely the result of objective medial restrictions, but that they have been enforced by the film industry to impose the linear narrative patterns of Classical Hollywood cinema, as highlighted by Pérez-González (2007), who draws on the work of Mowitt (2004). It would be interesting to see other researchers exploring the interface between synchronization and narrative organization, for instance, along the lines of generic conventions—e.g. differences among cartoons, advertisements, films, television series and documentaries, as it has been commonly argued that different genres demand different levels of synchronization. On the whole, constraints have been discussed at length in the literature, but no alternative approaches have yet been articulated in terms of actual dubbing practice.

**Dubbing process**

This chapter now turns to consider the role that various agents play in the dubbing production chain, in order to draw attention to the complexity of the dubbing process and the challenges this represents for dubbing research. A dubbed film or TV programme is the result of the work of many people: translators, dialogue writers, dubbing directors, actors and sound engineers. According to Chaume, ‘Western European dubbing workflows’ follow a specific ‘production chain’ (2012: 29) that begins when translators are sent a script to produce a rough translation and, sometimes, also a first draft of the target language dialogue. When translating and dialogue writing is done by different professionals, dialogue writers are responsible for the following tasks: synchronizing the text to the screen characters’ mouths; adding dubbing symbols, i.e. indications inserted in the translation that are meant to help actors to recreate a number of paralinguistic features of the original actors’ voice and performance; segmenting the translation into ‘takes’—i.e. units that play an important role in organizing the recording of voice talents and even setting the translators’ fees, depending on the country; and making the translated dialogue sound like spontaneous speech. If all these tasks are not carried out by dialogue writers they are taken over by dubbing assistants.

The text then goes back to the dubbing company that is in charge of the artistic and technical side of the dubbed production. It is at this point that the dubbing director sets out to find suitable voice talents—namely dubbing artists or ‘dubbers’. This is a particularly important stage in the process for, as Chaume emphasizes, the success of a dubbed product is contingent on the choice of the right voices (2012: 36). Despite the experience that dubbing directors have in making such creative decisions, viewers’ reactions can be sometimes unpredictable, and it is not uncommon for them to level criticisms against dubbing voice choices online or in the press. Directors also assist actors throughout the dubbing process, e.g. by giving them acting directions and providing them with information about the overall film plot—it should be noted that voice talents only have access to the loops or takes they are involved in recording at any given point. They record their takes in a dubbing booth, usually working alone or in separate booths, and hence without necessarily engaging in live interaction with other members of the dubbing cast. As a result, the process is a ‘continuous series of stops and starts, rather than a theatrical performance’ (ibid.: 37). Once the recording has been completed,
the sound engineers reassemble and edit the tracks that have been dubbed separately. They are responsible for synchronizing the new dubbed tracks with the international track and the original images. The text is then edited and ready to go back to the TV channel or to the commissioning film distributor. Voice talents and sound technicians or engineers thus work under the supervision of dubbing directors, who perform a similar role to that of a film, TV series or theatrical director, and they have the power to modify the initial translator’s and dialogue writer’s words as they see fit. However, dubbing actors may request to have certain lines of dialogue altered if they feel that they do not fit the style of their acting. Likewise, engineers also have their say when it comes to making changes to the translation. As this account reveals, dubbing involves many different agents who have the capacity to make changes to what the translators and dialogue writers have produced. This situation has an obvious impact on research and scholars ought to consider the whole of the production chain when proceeding to study dubbed products.

There have been a number of studies on the dubbing process in Europe, notably by Chaume (2007, 2012), who presents the chain of production in France, Italy, Germany and Spain, and Sanz Ortega (2015) who delivers a thorough account of the dubbing process in Spain as part of her study of the impact of dubbing on plot and characterization in polylg ot films. Although Chaume concedes that the differences between countries are minimal (2012: 29–37), some of them are significant. For instance, France has developed a specific synchronization system called ‘the rhythm-band method’ (see O’Sullivan and Cornu, Chapter 2, this volume); in Germany, rates are determined based on the number of words to be translated, whereas in Italy they are based on the number of translated reels. It would therefore be interesting to explore the impact that these varying working conditions in the industry have on dubbing products. We are lacking, for instance, studies on the status of translators, with the notable exception of Sanz Ortega (2015), dialogue writers and dubbing artists. We also need to know more about how dubbing is performed by professionals and fans in non-Western markets, particularly in Asia, Africa and Oceania, since different practices or traditions exist according to where dubbing is practised or performed.

**Idiosyncrasy of dubbed language**

Another prolific research angle in dubbing studies pertains to the idiosyncrasy of dubbed language. Chaume explains that ‘what sets the linguistic code apart in audiovisual texts is that in films, television series, cartoons and certain advertisements, we are dealing with a written text that must seem oral and spontaneous’ (2012: 100). As can be inferred from this quote, dubbing is considered to be a very specific type of discourse. Dubbed dialogue is a ‘combination of linguistic features used both in spoken and written texts’ (Chaume 2012: 81, drawing from Remael 2000; Chaume 2004a, Pérez-González 2007), although it can be conceptualized more specifically as a simulation of spontaneous speech (Franzelli 2008: 225) as it mimics speech by using false starts, repetitions, ellipsis, pauses and interruptions. However, this orality is an illusion; it is ‘préfabriquée’ (Tomaszkiewicz 2001: 381)—as it is ‘actually planned, or as we might say feigned, false, prefabricated’ (Chaume 2012: 82; see also Baños 2009 and Baños and Chaume 2009). This is because dubbed dialogue has its origin in a script that is ‘written to be spoken as if not written’ (Gregory and Carroll 1978: 42) or, as Remael (2003: 227) puts it, it is a form of ‘secondary speech’.

Researchers have also emphasized that dubbed language has a specific sound to it; it does not sound like original dialogue. It ‘does not correspond to the way normal people talk’ (Whitman-Linsen 1992: 118) and, in some instances, characters have been described
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as ‘speak[ing] like printing pages’ (Assis 2001: 216). The term ‘dubbese’, first coined by Pavesi (1996), is now widely used to talk about dubbed language in particular as a ‘culture-specific linguistic and stylistic model for dubbed texts’ that is ‘similar, but not equal to real oral discourse and external production oral discourse (i.e. original target-culture films, sitcoms, etc.)’ (Chaume 2012: 87). Many other scholars have since followed Pavesi’s lead, including Chaume (2004a), Baños (2009), Marzà and Chaume (2009) and Freddi and Pavesi (2009).

According to Chaume, (dubbed) dialogue writing must meet the following three requirements: ‘creating the effect of natural, credible and true-to-life dialogue’, ‘complying with lip-sync’ and ‘promot[ing] a balance which avoids overacting and underacting when dubbing actors perform the dialogues (i.e. avoiding cacophonies, etc.)’ (2012: 88). The fact that these three criteria are not always met, as a result of what Chaume refers to as the burden of dubbing, acknowledges that dubbing ‘consolidated at a time when imitating real spoken language was completely unacceptable’ (2012: 91). Nevertheless, as Caillé (1960) points out, dubbing should aim to realistically convey the ‘content’ of the human voice in order for it to be taken seriously by audiences. According to him, lip-synchronization should not be the aspect to consider when dubbing, as this is crucial only when dealing with close-ups; rather, the emphasis should be on recreating the rhythm, sensitivity, anger or tenderness conveyed by the original. Therefore, a dubbed version should endeavour to keep the ‘savour’ or taste of the original voice, since ‘if the voices of actors are judiciously chosen, if the dubbed text is judiciously translated, if it moves or entertains, we have succeeded’ (1960: 107, my translation). Caillé thus foregrounds that the choice of dubbing voices may be a crucial factor in terms of a film’s audience appreciation.

**Voice and prosody**

Although there are studies positing that it is important to maintain the qualities of the voices of the original actors (e.g. Mingant 2010, Bosseaux 2015, 2018, and Sanz Ortega 2015) more reception studies are needed to ascertain what the actual impact of voice attribution is on dubbed products. According to Chion, the source of the sound is normally understood to be what is seen on screen—something which dubbing changes drastically. Drawing on Jean Renoir, Chion explains that ‘accepting dubbing is like ceasing to believe in the oneness of the individual’ (1985: 74, my translation). Indeed, in dubbing, the original body is separated from its original voice, even if dubbed films give the illusion that the voice and the body are working together. As Bosseaux points out, a dubbed voice ‘changes pitch, articulation, class, regional context, colloquialisms, individual turns of phrase, timbre, educational levels and other suggestions of cultural positions and capabilities’ (2015: 69). It is thus worth wondering to what extent viewers engage differently based on changes in voice.

On the whole, voice has generally been overlooked in dubbing research. A notable exception is Bosseaux (2015, 2018), whose work aims to understand the impact of dubbing on characterization and performance, with a strong focus on voice. Bosseaux explains for instance that, in the French context, it is not uncommon for actors’ voices to change from film to film. For instance, the American actress Julianne Moore has had eleven French voices since the beginning of her career. One voice talent can also lend his or her voice to different foreign actors. For instance Isabelle Gardien, one of Moore’s French voices, also gives her voice to Cate Blanchett, Emily Watson and Tilda Swinton. It is difficult, however, to comment on the significance of such changes in greater detail, since to this day no comprehensive experimental studies have been carried out to gain a good understanding of
how audiences perceive voices, the impact of having an actor dubbed by different dubbing actors, or the effect of having the same voice talent lending his or her voice to numerous foreign actors.

There are also very enlightening studies investigating how geographic and social accents are dealt with in dubbing—all of which reveal the extent to which rendering those in the target language is a thorny endeavour. The collections edited by Armstrong and Federici (2006) and Federici (2009) illustrate the challenges involved in mediating regional, social and idiolectal varieties of language. Examples include the works of Parini (2009), who analyzes how Italian-speaking gangsters or *mafiosi* in American films such as *Goodfellas* (Martin Scorsese 1990) and *Donnie Brasco* (Mike Newell 1997) are sometimes dubbed into Sicilian in the Italian dubbed versions; Taylor (2006), who highlights that the different dialects and sociolects typically associated with the working class used in the films of British director Ken Loach are neutralized in the Italian dubbed versions; and Dore (2009), who discusses the target-culture approach adopted in the dubbing of the first series of *The Simpsons* and, in particular, the choice of Neapolitan and Sicilian to translate sociolects and dialects. Additionally, Mingant (2010) sets out to ‘look at the codified relationship between a film and its audience, the issue of voice texture, and how dubbing may result in a loss of narrative and thematic construction’ (2010: 713). Mingant emphasizes that dubbing involves a double suspension of disbelief, a pact with viewers whereby the audience ‘tacitly accepts’ (2010: 713) what is shown to them on-screen at face value. In the dubbed version, this suspension of disbelief is doubled as it ‘requires that most of the characters should speak French’ (*ibid.*: 715). She explains that ‘spectators routinely accept to twice suspend their disbelief, passing over the discrepancy between nationality and language’ (*ibid.*: 717). Indeed, if cinema creates an illusion, dubbing creates ‘the illusion of an illusion’ (Caillé 1960: 108, my translation). Mingant highlights that, when translating accents, there is a common strategy of neutralization in France and ‘most Hollywood male actors tend to have the neutral voice of a man in his late thirties’ (*ibid.*: 722). She mentions the example of Jean-Pierre Michaël, who gives his voice to Brad Pitt and has also dubbed Keanu Reeves, Michael Fassbender, Jude Law, Christian Bale, Ethan Hawke and Ben Affleck. What this means is that a French voice talent is hired to dub multiple American, English or Spanish actors, which could prove confusing for viewers. The dearth of reception studies about these cases represents an important research niche to be addressed in the future.

Intonation is another aspect that has received very little attention in dubbing, despite the relatively sizeable body of literature addressing the nature of dubbing as prefabricated discourse. Works by scholars such as Chaume (2012), Marzá and Chaume (2009), Whitman-Linsen (1992) and Baños and Chaume (2009) have all commented on the important role of prosody and paralinguistic elements; there remains, however, a lack of actual empirical studies on intonation. A notable exception is the work of Sánchez Mompeán (2012, 2016, forthcoming), the only scholar to have approached the study of prosody, i.e. patterns of stress and intonation, empirically to date. She analyzes paralinguistic as well as prosodic elements (tonicity, tone, tonality, pitch-direction, pitch-range, loudness and tempo) in the original and dubbed versions of a film, in an attempt to demonstrate the importance of pronunciation as a meaning-making strategy. Sánchez Mompeán explains that intonation is more often than not overlooked and emphasizes that dubbed versions are ‘often depleted of the connotative richness transmitted through intonation in the original sitcom’ (2016: 18). Sánchez Mompeán’s work on the importance of intonation demonstrates the importance of investigating not only what people say, but also how they say it. In dubbing, we are not only dealing with words but also with paralinguistic elements and prosodic features such as intonation, rhythm, timbre
and volume. Drawing on Perego and Taylor (2009), Sánchez Mompeán also highlights that the ‘limited number of dubbing actors does not suffice to provide a colourful repertoire of tones, necessary to convey all kinds of voices and sound convincing’ (2012: 2), a statement reflecting points made earlier in this chapter on the choice of voices.

Finally, in recent years, multilingualism has also become a much discussed topic (e.g. Corrius 2008, Díaz Cintas 2011, Martínez-Sierra et al. 2010, and de Higes Andino et al. 2013). The role of multilingualism, a rather new development in dubbing research, is elaborated on in the next section, which outlines future trajectories of dubbing scholarship and articulates the new debates with which scholars are engaging.

Future trajectory and new debates

The remainder of this chapter focuses on new research directions and debates that are already attracting significant attention from dubbing specialists.

Fan/fundubbing

To start with, it is important to consider new working practices that are expected to change the way we experience traditional dubbing. First of all, there is the development of fandubbing or fandubs which are ‘home-made dubblings of television series, cartoons (particularly of Japanese *anime*) and trailers that have not yet been released in the target language country’ (Chaume 2013: 111) and are broadcast on the web. Fandubs and fandubbing are also referred to as ‘fundubs’ or ‘fundubbing’ to emphasize the ‘witty and humorous nature of this type of home-grown dubbing’ (ibid.). Apart from Adobe Premiere, Windows Movie Maker is the most commonly used tool in the context of fandubbing: fans working from home translate, lip-sync and revoice the dialogues, record them in a new soundtrack and upload them back on the web. In addition to Windows Movie Maker, fandubbers also rely on Virtual Dub, an open-source freeware video capture and video processing utility that can also be used with Microsoft Windows. As far as commercial tools are concerned, two software applications developed by KIWA—VoiceQ ADR (Audio Dialogue Replacement) and VoiceQ DUB—are also popular. Given the growing ubiquity of fandubbing tools, it will be interesting to gauge the future impact of fandubbing practices on professional dubbing. Could these lead to the enforcement of alternative medial constraints derived from the varying synchronization conventions, across audiovisual genres and national industries? And could viewers’ perception of these constraints and viewing habits change over time?

Technologization

Software is also being developed with the capacity to ‘transfer[ing] the physical qualities of actors’ voices across languages’ (Pérez-González 2014: 23). Reel Voice system, developed by Voxworks, is a good example of voice-conversion technology that allows dialogues in the target language to be recorded and manipulated in various ways. Crucially, Reel Voice makes it possible to align the pitch of the target language voice with that of the original screen actor’s voice. Another piece of software, Video Rewrite, can be used to ‘automate the production of audiovisual footage’ (ibid.), using existing footage to create a new clip of a ‘person mouthing words that she did not speak in the original footage’ (ibid.: 24). Both software applications may impact on future dubbing practices—although, apart from Chaume’s
(2012) and Pérez-González’s (2014) general accounts, these technological developments have not been so far explored in depth by dubbing scholars.

In sum, advances in technology, the role of the Internet, social media, and new software are not only changing the way dubbing is conducted, but also the way translation professionals and viewers think about dubbing and watch audiovisual material. However, there would seem to be very little ongoing research addressing these developments, and it is hoped that scholars will fill in this gap in the near future.

**Film studies, multimodality and AVT**

The first significant turn in dubbing research has been driven by a call from scholars such as Chaume (2004b and 2012) for a more fluid conversation between film studies and AVT by undertaking interdisciplinary research. Chaume’s advocacy for a heightened convergence between these two disciplinary areas has been accompanied by a range of pioneering pieces of research on film dialogue, scriptwriting, screenwriting and screenplays by Remael (2000, 2004 and 2008), Cattrysse and Gambier (2008) and, more recently, Martínez-Sierra (2012), Sanz Ortega on polyglot films (2015), and Bosseaux on characterization and performance (2015). Indeed, it is fair to say that film studies scholars do not usually pay attention to the role and impact of translation in the film process, with the notable exception of Egoyan and Balfour (2004). This is a view also shared within film studies. In the early pages of *Cinema Babel*, for example, Nornes (2007: 3–4) reiterates that film studies scholars have for too long failed to consider the implications of translation.

Closely related to this push for interdisciplinarity are multimodal studies, which have been advocated by various scholars (e.g. Bosseaux 2015, Chaume 2012 and Pérez-González 2007). Generally, proponents of the relevance of multimodality to dubbing studies claim that, in order to get a full or better picture of the dubbing process and the impact of dubbing, we need to engage not only with the linguistic mode but also with the verbal and non-verbal (including visual and acoustic) semiotics of translated multimodal texts. Bosseaux (2015) for instance, proposes a multimodal model for the analysis of acoustic and visual aspects of performance in original audiovisual texts and their dubbed counterparts, in an attempt to reveal how dubbing may affect characterization. Through a careful analysis of visual (e.g. body movements, facial expressions), oral (vocal) and linguistic semiotics, Bosseaux demonstrates the extent to which dubbing alters the performance delivered in the original audiovisual text.

**Film industry and AVT**

Another new trajectory revolves around attempts to explore and develop research on the interface between AVT and the film industry. According to Lambourne (2012), only 0.1–1 per cent of a film’s production budget is devoted to AVT translation (including accessibility), which represents a negligible share of the revenue generated by blockbusters worldwide. Drawing on various sources of box office data for the first decade of this century, Romero-Fresco (2013) highlights that:

Best Picture Oscar-winning Hollywood films made between 2001 and 2011 came from foreign markets. Of this, more than three-quarters (80.4% and 76.3%, respectively) was from foreign countries where these films are subtitled or dubbed. The remaining revenue came from territories where the films are shown in English but where some viewers are likely to watch them with AD and especially SDH.
A paradox thus emerges: if translation generates so much of the revenue of a film, why is it so often left as an ‘afterthought rather than a natural component of the film’ (Sinha 2004: 174)? This is not only true of subtitling, the focus of Sinha’s essay, but also of dubbing, with dubbed versions also ‘suffer[ing] from a lack of resources at the post-production stage’ (Lebtahi 2004: 409, my translation). Romero-Fresco (2013) explains that in order to make films that are more accessible, filmmakers need to be aware of the impact translation has on a finished product. He goes on to argue that, instead of being confined to the post-production stage, translation needs should be addressed during the pre-production and production stages, as part of what he calls ‘accessible filmmaking’. Romero-Fresco (2013) defines this approach as:

the consideration during the filmmaking process (and through collaboration between the translator and the creative team of the film) of some of the aspects that are required to make a film accessible to viewers in other languages and viewers with hearing or visual loss.

Extending the logic of Romero-Fresco’s argument, industrial attention to dubbing should not be restricted to the distribution stage. Instead, it should feature at least during the post-production process, with directors ideally engaging in conversations with translators, as Stanley Kubrick, for instance, used to do (Zanotti, forthcoming). It is promising to see that changes are already taking pace in the film industry, in the form of creative subtitling (McClarty 2012) and ‘part-subtitling’ (O’Sullivan 2008) in multilingual films, e.g. in blockbusters like Slumdog Millionaire (2008) and Inglourious Basterds (2009), where ‘subtitles take up as much as 70 per cent of the dialogue’ (Romero-Fresco 2013).

Just as Romero-Fresco’s accessible filmmaking is about encouraging more collaborative work between subtitlers and pre- and post-production teams, Bosseaux’s work (2015)—which aims to raise awareness of the impact of dubbing on performance and characterization at a theoretical level—also has practical implications. It draws on the premise that characterization is contingent on the dubbing actors’ mastery of their voices—e.g. Daniel Day Lewis in Lincoln (2012)—and raises concerns about the feasibility of recreating this important aspect of filmic creativity, given that dubbing crews and particular voice actors work under tight deadlines to come up with successful characterization strategies in dubbed films, in a context that demands a high degree of creativity at the best of times. Speaking about Inglourious Basterds (2009) on occasion of its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, Quentin Tarantino is purported to have said that ‘it does not make sense to dub this film’ (quoted in Mingant 2010: 713). The fluid interaction between the various languages (English, German, French and Italian) spoken by characters in this film is reported to have driven Tarantino’s artistic vision (O’Sullivan 2010, Mingant 2010, Sanz Ortega 2015). How can this creative feature be recreated when, as part of its international distribution process, the film has to be dubbed into French, Italian and Spanish? The reception enjoyed by these dubbed versions may have been warmer, if an effort had been made to contextualize the role of this linguistic interplay in the filmic narrative—e.g. by explaining where the characters come from or what their accents signal. Paying more attention to how films are dubbed would therefore represent the first step towards making them more ‘accessible’, to use Romero-Fresco’s term.

Summary

Reading audiovisual products is a complex task. The visual and acoustic elements combine to generate meaning and there are many modalities to consider. Moreover, meaning is not
fixed and can—and often will—vary from one audience to the next. Indeed, when audiovisual products travel in translation it is hard to know how they will be received or perceived, and it would be unrealistic to expect that perception to be the same for different linguacultures.

This chapter has shown that the various agents and technical dimensions involved make dubbing a rich and complex process. One of the most common objections to dubbing is that audiences do not get to hear the original voices. Indeed, as early as 1936, Jean Fayard, editor of the French journal Pour Vous, commented that audiences can only ‘appreciate Wallace Beery, Katharine Hepburn or Clark Gable if they hear their original voice; their gestures, without the intonations that go with them, lose all their significance’ (1936, my translation). What Fayard is highlighting is that, if audiences cannot hear the voices of actors, there will be a mismatch between what is seen and what is heard and the whole of the performance will cease to make sense. That is not to say that voice actors should mimic the intonation of the original, a practice that Chaves (2000) identifies in the Spanish context as ‘la curva’ and which was used with the first dubbed American films. As Sánchez Mompeán puts it, they should instead ‘bear in mind the intended purpose and try to reproduce the same effect by making use of their own patterns, which could indeed coincide in both languages’ (2012: 95).

It is fair to say that there are many interesting and valuable studies on dubbing but, as this chapter has tried to show, there is still room for further investigation with a focus on interdisciplinarity, multimodality, and more communication between researchers and practitioners. More importantly, it has been noted that dubbing research has been conducted almost exclusively by European scholars, and hence is running the risk of being viewed as Eurocentric. Since dubbing is used all over the world, knowing more about professional practices in non-Western countries with a dubbing tradition, or where dubbing practices are emerging, would represent an invaluable contribution to the internationalization of dubbing studies.

Further reading

Bosseaux, C. (2015) Dubbing, Film and Performance: Uncanny Encounters, Oxford: Peter Lang | In this book, Bosseaux uses a multimodal, tripartite model that can be used to investigate how visual, acoustic and linguistic elements are combined for the purposes of characterization in original films and their respective dubbed versions.

Chaume, F. (2012) Audiovisual Translation: Dubbing, Manchester: St Jerome Publishing | This textbook presents an overview of dubbing research and practice. It includes various practical exercises that are useful to yield insights into the practice of dubbing.


Related topics

2 History of audiovisual translation
5 Voice-over: practice, research and future prospects
6 Subtitling for deaf and hard of hearing audiences: moving forward
11 Film remakes as a form of translation
17 Multimodality and audiovisual translation: cohesion in accessible films
18 Sociolinguistics and linguistic variation in audiovisual translation
19 Gender in audiovisual translation: advocating for gender awareness
References


Fayard, J. (1936) ‘Doublage . . . or not doublage’, *Pour Vous* 372, 2 janvier. Available online: http://www.ataa.fr/blog/doublage-or-not-doublage/ [last access 20 December 2017].


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Virtual Dub: http://www.virtualdub.org/index.html [last access 20 December 2017].
VoiceQ ADR and DUB: https://www.voiceq.com/ [last access 20 December 2017].
Windows Movie Maker: http://www.windows-movie-maker.org/ [last access 20 December 2017].